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## Knowledge as a Key to Good Fortune

Sam (Josipovits) Young



It is snowing and I'm bored. What should I do? People who know me have asked me to write down the way I survived the Second World War. You see, I am a Jew, and I was born in 1922. Since the weather is bad and I have nothing else to do, I will try to commit my memories to paper.

As I said, I was born in 1922 – December 22, 1922, to be exact – in the town of Sevlus in the Czech Republic. I have been told that my mother had a rough time. I was a big baby, and Mother was a tiny woman. She wanted me to be born on my grandfather's farm, so she spent three days in labor there. The attending physician finally used forceps to force me out into the world – I still have small indentations on the front and back of my skull. I have been told that I was blue from lack of oxygen at birth. I was dipped in hot water then in ice water, until I finally started to breathe on my own.

I do not remember anything of my first few years of life, but my parents told me that I was a “very active” child. When my sister was born two years later, my parents had to hire two nursemaids to look after us.

I do remember that I always liked animals, especially horses, rabbits, and dogs. I am not sure how old I was when this happened, but we had a big dog that I harnessed to a small sleigh. The dog was very strong, and he pulled my sister and me in the sleigh out to my grandparents' farm – a distance of about 4 km. We were there until evening, when a horse-drawn sleigh brought us back home. Since there were no telephones, my parents had no idea what had become of my sister and me. They were looking all over town for

us and had enlisted the help of our neighbors. We were nowhere to be found, and they were very worried. Upon our return, I received a spanking that I still remember!

During my early childhood I spent a great deal of time on my grandparents' farm and also on my uncle's farm. Uncle had lots of sheep. He taught me to ride on one of his whethers. In later years, whenever I could get out of school, I headed out to one of the farms, always playing with the animals and riding the horses.

At the age of about three, I started attending Hebrew school, where I was taught to read Hebrew and studied the Bible. At six years old, I started attending a Czech school. Most of my schoolmates were Czech Christian children. We got along very well. Naturally I learned to speak Czech. By this time, I spoke Hungarian, the language we spoke at home, Russian, the language of the farm workers, and now Czech, the language of school. I was an average student in the Czech school, but I got along well with my schoolmates, and my teachers liked me. I socialized with my Christian classmates, playing soccer at every opportunity and during the Christmas season even going caroling with them, carrying the little Jesus from house to house. My Christian friends also came to our house to help us celebrate Hanukkah. They were jealous because we received gifts for the eight days of Hanukkah, and they only got presents on Christmas Eve and Christmas day.

My father was a physician – a general practitioner. His office was in three large rooms in the front of our house on the main street of Sevlus. We lived in the back. Our house was never locked with the exception of Father's office. Since there were no telephones, people

did not make appointments with the doctor; they just came day or night. At night they would simply knock on my parents' bedroom window. Father treated the families of the barons, the working people, and even the Gypsies of the area. Because of my father's medical practice, all 12,000 people in our town and the surrounding area knew my family. Due to the lack of an appointment schedule, there were times when even the large waiting room could not hold the crowd, and Mother would invite some of the patients into our living room. Mother often had to help Father, as he had no nurse, assistant, or bookkeeper. My father never billed any of his patients, but they did pay, and we were well off. As I grew older my father wanted me to get used to the sight of blood so that I could follow in his footsteps. It did not work; any time I saw blood, I fainted. Even today, I cannot treat a wound or give an injection to a horse or dog, much less a person. When I go to a doctor, I do not want to know any details. I take my heart medications because my wife makes me do so. I had another problem with Father's practice. Prostitution was legal in Czechoslovakia, and the "working girls" were licensed by the state. To maintain their license, prostitutes had to have regular health checks. When I was fourteen or fifteen, the day for these checks was Thursday. Father's waiting room would be filled with hookers who would ask me to help them get special treatment if they caught sight of me. They knew me well, not something I wanted my parents to realize! I tried to avoid the house on Thursdays.

Life in Sevlus was wonderful. This Czech government was very democratic; the president, Jan Masaryk, was a marvelous man. There was prosperity, and all nationalities had freedom. The Hungarian population had Hungarian schools, the Russians had

Russian schools, the Jews had Hebrew schools, and the Germans had German schools. Up to a point, the different ethnic populations lived separately, but they all lived in harmony. Due to my parents' position, my sister and I had "free run" of the town. We could go into any store and buy anything we wanted, and the proprietor would simply charge it to the Josipovits account. I think I was about ten or eleven years old when my parents bought my uncle's interest in the farm. My grandfather and uncle were joint owners, so my mother became half owner. She was a very good businesswoman and very bright. She never had any jewelry or went to the beauty parlor. Her life was caring for her family and helping anyone who was in need. Despite running the farm – where we grew tobacco, wheat, corn, and vegetables – she spent a lot of time with my sister and me. We had many books in the house, mostly classics, which she would read to us. As we grew older, she had us read them to her. She also made sure that we learned basic arithmetic, especially multiplication and division, to the point that we could answer problems without conscious thought. To this day, I still multiply and divide in my head in Hungarian. My sister and I were assigned chores from a very early age; my sister's chores were mainly in the house, and mine were mostly outside.

With my father's busy medical practice and my mother's farm and vineyard, we lived very comfortably and were well known in the community. Then in 1933, Hitler and the Nazi party came to power in Germany. I remember the day. We were listening to the radio, and Hitler made a long speech blaming the Jews for all the problems of the world. From that time on, the situation of all the ethnic groups in our town and our country changed. The harmony between the different groups deteriorated, and anti-Semitism

started. Our family was not affected initially, since the people needed my father's services and my mother's financial help from the farm. We did feel the deterioration of the situation when I was in the Czech gymnasium about twenty miles from our town. The gymnasium is a secondary school that prepares students for university. I began to experience anti-Semitism from many of my fellow students and from the teachers. My parents realized my situation and decided to change schools. They sent me to the Hebrew gymnasium in Munkacs. Since I did not speak Hebrew, a graduate student was sent to our house to tutor me for one month. I took the entrance examination and became a student in the second grade of an eight-year gymnasium.

This school was very nice; most of the subjects were taught in Hebrew. There were about twenty to thirty pupils to a class. There were no electives: every student had to take all the prescribed subjects. We went to school six days a week, ten months of the year, and were graded every ten weeks. To progress, a student had to pass all the subjects. If he failed two, he had to repeat the class. If he failed one, he had the opportunity to take an examination after the two-month vacation. If he passed he could continue. If not, he had to repeat the whole year. When the Hungarians took over Munkacs, where the Hebrew gymnasium was, all our professors left for wherever it was possible for them to immigrate. The school was changed to a Jewish gymnasium, and new teachers were brought from Hungary. There were many other changes. We had to study Hungarian history; we had to pray that God would save the Hungarians; we had to recite many Hungarian poems. We had to sit in class wearing a yarmulke on our heads. One mandatory subject was the Bible. I did not like that subject. I passed every class but, with

the exception of physics, I was just an average student.

Our professors were exceptional. Most of them came to Czechoslovakia from Russia in order to escape communism. They almost lived with the students. They knew every one of us. They were very strict when it came to learning. The school was a private school. Tuition was based on the ability of the parents to pay, but no student was turned down if the parents could not afford it. The tuition a parent paid was kept secret. Grading was absolutely on performance.

The school was Zionist oriented, and we learned much about Israel and the Zionist organization. Some of our teachers were also involved in very various Zionist groups. We also had teachers who were not Jewish. The three Zionist organizations were:

The "Betar," whose leader was Jabotinsky, who believed that Israel could be made a Jewish homeland only by military intervention.

The "Shomer" whose leader was Ben-Gurion, who advocated passive resistance and work projects in Israel.

The "Mizrahi," which was a religious organization whose theory was that a Jewish state could be created only by religious belief.

I belonged to the "Betar," where we were trained how to defend ourselves and how to fight if we could not avoid it – and how to fight with all our might. There were major rifts between these organizations, but to establish the state of Israel, all three had major parts.

I graduated from the school in Munkacs in June 1941. I received my graduation certificate, which entitled me to become a student of any university in Europe and, in America, to two years' college credit.

To make my story understandable, however, I must go back prior to 1941. Things in Europe grew steadily worse. The situation of the Jews in Germany became unbearable. They were deprived of their businesses and professions. They had no choice but to emigrate or to try to save themselves any way they could. Many of them came to Czechoslovakia, where they were helped mostly by the Jews who lived there. Many were retrained to do farm work, in preparation for going to Israel. A major retraining project was conducted on the farm of my uncle, who leased about 1200 acres.

When I was out of school, I spent some time with these people and saw how they were able to learn the hard physical labor of farming, which they had never done before. I also spent time on our farm, which was owned by my grandparents and my mother. When I was about sixteen, I was able to do just about any farm work, with the exception of carrying wheat sacks, which weighed about 80 kg (around 200 pounds). Generally I worked the same as any of our employees. At harvest time, when work started at 3 A.M., my mother would wake me up first; then, after I fed and cleaned up the horses, I worked until sundown. I did have a two hour break for lunch.

The situation in Europe kept deteriorating. First Germany occupied part of Austria, then part of Czechoslovakia in 1936. There are many history books that describe what

happened up until 1938, when the war started between Poland and Germany and when England and France declared war. Our lives during that period were very difficult, but people needed my father's services, so our family was relatively better off than the rest of the Jewish population, until July 15, 1941. It was harvest time. I was on the farm; my mother, father, and sister were at home. They sent a message to tell me that I should come home. I got on my bicycle, and when I got to the house, the city police were there. They were very polite and said that we should take just some clothes for one day, because we were supposed to go to Hust, about twenty miles from our home, for some routine investigation. We were not very concerned; we had never been accused of anything. So Mother packed some underwear and other small items in a small suitcase, and Father took his medical case, from which he was never separated, and we were taken to the railroad station. When we got there, there were many Jewish people – wives with their children but without husbands, young adults without parents, and some older people without their children. The situation did not make sense to us. What was most surprising was they ordered us to get into boxcars instead of passenger cars. But to get to Hust took about two hours by train, so nobody made an issue of it. The strange thing was that soldiers with guns were around the train. The train did not even stop in Hust; instead, we were taken to a town by the name of Jasina, which was on the border of Russia, and placed in a lumber mill. I did not mention that before 1939, we became Hungarians, and this procedure was carried out by the Hungarians, who were almost as anti-Semitic as the Germans. When in 1939 they took over the area where we lived, they first drafted all draft eligible Christians and Jews into the Hungarian Army. Then they separated the Jews into labor brigades under armed supervision. Except for an Army cap and a yellow

armband, the Jews had to supply their own clothing. They became workers for the military. Almost daily, new anti-Jewish laws were enacted. Businesses were taken away. Jews could not be store owners, and Jews were precluded from holding government offices. Our family was relatively less affected, because my father's services were needed and because we were well thought of by the population of the city. Our radios were taken away.

When we arrived in Jasina, the train was driven to a lumber mill, and we were unloaded there. I do not remember whether any food was provided, but we were locked up for the night. In the morning, each family or individual was taken in front of a military board consisting of three officers. Our personal identifications papers, money, and any gold watches and rings were taken away. We were loaded onto military trucks and taken over the border to Russia, now occupied by the Germans. The movement of the trucks was slow, because the roads were bombed out and the bridges destroyed. When we came to a river or stream, we had to get out of the trucks and cross on foot and then reboard the trucks. At one of the rivers, an older lady was injured when she jumped off the truck, and somebody came to get Father so he could assist her. Father went, and he was late coming back to the truck we were on. When he returned, the soldier in charge of our truck tried to hit my father with his gun. I raised my hand against the gun and said, "Don't you dare hit my father." He was taken aback, and we got onto the truck. I sat close to the cab. My sister sat in the back at the tailgate. The soldier brought another soldier, pointed me out, and told him that when we arrived at the place where we were being taken, they would shoot me. My sister heard that. The trucks were going into an area unknown to us, with

much destruction of roads and villages. We came at last to a place where the road was next to a cemetery. We were told to get out of the trucks and never try to get back to Hungary.

The cemetery had a stone wall. I jumped over the wall and hid behind it. The soldiers looked for me, but when they were not able to find me, they departed. We were left on the road not knowing where we were. After a short time, men in civilian clothes with guns and white armbands came and directed us to go with them. They were Ukrainians, and we could communicate with them in Russian. One of the militiamen was the mayor of the town, whose wife was very sick. We were taken to a large farm, which during the Polish government belonged to Graf Lance Koronsky, who raised Arab horses. The barn that had no horses in it, only a few dead colts. We were told that the Russian Army had taken the horses. The local population consisted of Ukrainians, Poles, and some Jews, who came to see us and were very helpful. They brought some food, and the Polish manager of the farm took some men to the field to get potatoes and vegetables. The Jewish population brought whatever they had to us. We settled in the barn. There was water and straw, and the little food we received was of great help.

The mayor came to see my father and took him to examine his wife. I don't know what her sickness was, but my father must have been of some help, because now we were treated somewhat better than the rest of the group by the militia. The fact that we could speak their language also helped. Father found out from the mayor that there was a Polish doctor in the village and asked to go see him.

Some days later, we were told that the whole group would go to another town. The doctor told my father that he was the only doctor in the village and was not able to care for all the patients, so he made arrangements for us to stay there. The name of the village was Jagielnica. I do not remember how many days we spent in that barn, because every day felt like a lifetime. All the people were forced to walk to the town of Kamenec-Pudolsk, where they were told to assemble in the marketplace of the town because they were going to be taken back to Hungary. They did so. German trucks came and mowed down the group with machine guns, killing them all, with the exception of three young men who had gone to fetch water. When they saw what was happening they escaped and told us about it.

Our family – Father, Mother, my sister, and I – were taken to the house of Dr. Lachowicz. The house was large and built on the side of a hill. It had two stories. To get to the lower floor, you had to go down a few steps; and to the upper floor, about fifteen steps up. A militiaman escorted us. When we came to the house, the houseboy, Bronek, told us to go down to the lower story. In the front room was a table with hard-boiled eggs, milk, and bread on it. We ate. Those eggs were the best I have ever eaten. Afterward, Bronek told us that the bathroom was prepared, and we could use it. Being able to bathe and clean up after living in the barn, being in boxcars, and traveling in an open truck was an unforgettable experience. After we got cleaned up, Dr. Lachowicz and his wife came to greet us. We were given two rooms downstairs and told to make ourselves comfortable and that everything would be okay. I will never forget the kindness of Dr. Lachowicz. We

lived with them for one year. To describe our life during that year would take another book. Father started to work with Dr. Lachowicz, but very shortly Father had so many patients that Dr. Lachowicz opened a separate office for them in the house.

Conditions in the village were such that even today I hate to describe them. It seems impossible to me that anyone could survive them. There were no stores. People could go from one town to another only with a special permit. Medical supplies were available only from some people who were able to steal them from the forest, about four miles away, where the Russian Army had left them before decamping. There was also a lot of military equipment, mostly American, that had also been left behind in the forest by the Russian Army. Most of the patients who came for medical help brought bandages or all kinds of medicine they had stolen from the forest. I was lucky enough to get blue American overalls, which I wore for a year while in Jagielnica.

The German Army was stationed in Czortkov, about fifteen miles away, but they came almost daily and placed demands on the population. The Jewish community had to give them all their gold, silver, furs. The non-Jews had to give cattle, swine, and horses, of which they had very few. The Germans did everything possible to starve and freeze out the population. No grinding of grain was permitted, and no wood could be cut in the forest. The Germans confiscated the electric motor from the pump we used for water in the house. We had to pump by hand or go to the spring in the valley and carry water with two buckets over our shoulders.

Around the house was a fruit orchard with some large trees and a few big walnut trees. So we could have some wood for cooking, I cut these down with the help of Bronek, the houseboy, who was about my age and size. At night we would also go to the forest with very sharp hand saws and steal some wood and carry it home on our shoulders.

People who had grain took it to the water-powered mill at night, in the dark, in order to grind it. Bronek and I also spent a few nights in that mill and listened to the stories the women told about how Russian soldiers had raped them.

Again, our situation was somewhat better than that of most of the population because Father became much better known. They called him the Hungarian doctor, and for his services they brought whatever they could afford: sometimes a chicken, some bread, some pork. Mother would not eat pork, so we had to convince her that it was veal. She said that at home we never had such good veal.

Winter was very cold – 40° below, day after day; the snow was sometimes four to five feet high. To go out in the morning was very dangerous because the wind piled up the snow so high in places that a person could sink in and be found only in the spring.

The houses had to be draped around the outside with straw, with only a small opening of about 2' x 2' left open for some air. Peasants, if they had a few chickens or a calf, usually kept them in the house, which was normally one or two rooms for the whole family.

Now about the house of Dr. Lachowicz. It was a big house (I do not know how many rooms), and there were many people who lived there: Dr. and Mrs. Lachowicz and their daughter, Irena (who was about twelve or thirteen years old in 1941/1942), Mrs. Lachowicz' father and mother, sister, and brother-in-law. In addition, there was a little girl, about ten years old, whose name I do not remember. I was told that her parents had escaped the Germans but that she had been left behind. Then there was a grown young lady, a doctor's daughter, whose father had died, and Bronek, the houseboy, Mr. and Mrs. Polak, a Jewish dentist, and the four of us.

Everybody was part of the family. The doctor shared everything he received from his patients, and whenever there was something he could spare, he gave it to people in need, whoever they were. The family was Catholic, and, with the exception of the doctor, they all went to church on Sunday. Dr. Lachowicz stayed at home, washed his socks and underwear, and many times sent Bronek and me to deliver some gifts of whatever he had to people who were in need. Regardless of how dire the situation was, I never saw him lose his temper or show any disgust with the situation. I had never experienced such kindness to everybody. I keep his picture in my office and will always remember him. Unfortunately his kindness was not rewarded. When the Russians retook that part of Poland some years later, in 1944, someone came with a wagon to take Dr. Lachowicz to a patient. Dr. Lachowicz went and never came back. Neither his wife nor my father were able to find out what happened to him. Neither the Red Cross, the Russian government, nor the office of displaced people could locate him. The Israeli government declared him a righteous Christian. His wife and daughter left Jagielnica and moved to Kraków,

leaving everything behind. I was later able to visit them in Kraków. Mrs. Lachowicz died about eight years ago. Now we maintain contact with the daughter, Irena. While my parents were alive, they supported Mrs. Lachowicz and Irena. Since their death, my sister and I have been supporting Irena to the best of our ability.

Now to come back to our situation in Jagielnica in early 1942, which, as I mentioned before, was getting worse by the day. The situation of the Jews in Hungary had improved somewhat, as we found out from those of our family who still lived there. So we decided somehow to get back to Hungary. But to do that was very complicated. We had no transportation, and for us to go by foot was almost impossible and very dangerous. But to stay in the doctor's house was also. Despite the acceptance of the people, we knew that sooner or later we would be liquidated by the Germans. Life in Jagielnica was such that every day it was a miracle we were alive, and we knew the Dr. Lachowicz could not save us.

So in April 1942, we decided to take our chances. A patient of my father's had a team of horses, and he agreed to take us to the Hungarian border. There was a great deal of snow on the road. He had a sleigh with two wheels. In places where there was no snow, he put on the wheels, and the horses pulled us like a two wheeled trailer. We went as far as Kolomeya, a fairly large city, where we found out that the Jews had been taken to a ghetto. There was widespread, unbearable hunger there. People were dying by the hundreds. I will never forget a man who was completely emaciated and dazed clutching a raw potato that he was saving. We hid in the school broom closet for a few days, trying to

figure out what we should do. We were told that the Germans shot any Hungarian Jew who went beyond Kolomeya toward the Hungarian border. Finally we made the decision to try to get back to Jagielnica, to Dr. Lachowicz.

An influential person in the ghetto had connections with some German officers who were traveling to the Nester River, about halfway between Kolomeya and Jagielnica. By giving them some money, we were able to persuade them to take us to the village next to the river. When we got there, we found out where the Greek Orthodox priest lived. Father had a letter from the priest in Jagielnica, who was Father's patient, in which he wrote that we deserved to be treated kindly. The priest was helpful. He told Father that there was a Jewish doctor in the village, and he took us to his home. We stayed with the doctor overnight. The priest arranged a sleigh for us, and we went back to Jagielnica, to Dr. Lachowicz.

Dr. Lachowicz was very kind to us. We again stayed in the same two rooms, and Father returned to treating patients. I worked with Bronek doing whatever needed to be done around the house or in the fields. The villagers had small parcels of land – one or two acres – and because there were very few men, they needed help in the fields. Because I had worked on our farm, I was able to do it, and my sister, who was sixteen years old, was also an able worker. Very shortly we were known in the village as good workers and had no shortage of jobs. For our work, we received potatoes, corn, sugar beets, a chicken, or a loaf of bread. All that was very helpful to our survival. I could write many pages about our life in the village of Jagielnica, but nobody would believe that we survived

under those conditions. The reason for this miracle was in large part my father, who was a very good physician and could improvise. Many children suffered from iron deficiency and had no medication. Father got some sour apples. We took old rusty nails and inserted them into the apples for a day or two. Then they were taken out, and Father gave the apples to the patients to eat, not telling them about the nails. The villagers kept saying that the Hungarian doctor had miracle apples. The apples were a big success, but this was only one of Father's successes.

The situation of the Jews was getting worse, and we learned that in Hungary, because of changes in the government, the Jewish situation had improved, and we were able to get a few letters from our family. In June we decided to go back to Hungary by another way, going west and crossing the Carpathian mountains, where there were fewer Germans and the border was not heavily reinforced.

We got together with ten other Hungarian Jews, two men and eight women. We shared our meager resources, saved up some food, mostly dried bread, and undertook that journey. There were still some Jews in the villages, and we went from village to village, mostly at night. We had to reach a place in the Carpathian mountains by the name of Skole, the village next to the border. This village was a small resort high in the mountains. There were some Jews, but the situation was terrible, and there was no food. The people harvested nettles, which have glucose, and boiled them in water and ate them. A Jewish family hid us in an empty cabin to prepare us for the trip across the border on the ridge of the mountains. We hired a Ukrainian man whose profession was smuggling

between Hungary and Russia. This smuggler led us through the forest in the dark to the border, where we waited until the border patrol passed by, and then we crossed. It was so dark that we had to hold on to each other, and the mountain was so steep that we had to sit and slide down on the Hungarian side. He led us to a small village, as we had arranged, and then he left us. It is even today unbelievable to me how well this smuggler knew the terrain and how he was able to hear the steps of the border patrol and lead us over the border. When he left us, we did not really know where we were, but we went toward the village hoping to find some Jewish house. We had not gone very far when a Hungarian soldier ran into us and ordered us to go to their headquarters on the border, next to the railroad tracks between Hungary and Russia, now occupied by the Germans. It so happened that the officers in charge were not around. The highest ranking officer was a sergeant. He called the officer who was in the town of Volovetz and asked him what he should do with Jews who came over the border. He was ordered to take us to through the rail tunnel to Russia, which was not occupied by the Germans. When we were told that we would have to go, my mother stood up and said that we were not going. We were Hungarian citizens. Father had served in the Austro-Hungarian Army in the first war, and they could shoot us, but we were not going. The sergeant was taken aback and called the commander in Volovetz, told him what was happening, and asked what he should do. We were in the yard, but the windows were open in the building, and we could hear the telephone conversation. The officer told the sergeant to keep us there until afternoon and then send us by train to Volovetz to the military headquarters. After that the soldiers became very friendly with us. They gave us some food and treated my sister's foot, which had a piece of wood embedded in it. They shaved me, and one even asked my mother if

she would permit him to kiss my sister. My mother consented, and we became very friendly. In the afternoon, we were taken by train to Volovetz. After we were investigated, we were released. Volovetz was a prosperous place. Several Jews lived there, some of whom were very well-to-do, and we were invited to their home. From there my parents telephoned my aunt, told her where we were, and she wired us money. The next day we went home by train.

We arrived on July 15, 1942, exactly one year after we to been taken from our home. When we got there and recovered from the strain of our journey, I started to think about the year spent in Jagielnica. I realized that just managing to survive had been very stressful, but the things I had learned that year were very rewarding: getting to know Dr. Lachowicz, becoming friends with Bronek and a few other boys and girls, learning the Polish language, reading the many Russian books left behind by the Russian officers who had previously lived in the rooms we occupied all gave me much knowledge about the world. I lost the bitterness I had had toward our neighbors and Sevlus, who had always taken for granted my father's help with their health problems and my mother's financial support but had not come to our rescue when we ourselves were in need.

Dr. Lachowicz, who was a Pole and a Catholic, along with his family, had treated us with dignity and shared their house and food with us. They were not the only ones. Many people from the village also did what they could to help us survive at a time when they themselves lived under much stress. That experience taught me that it does not matter: Pole, Russian, Hungarian, or Jew. There are good people and not so good people in any

race or nationality.

We returned to the back portion our house, since the city authorities had leased part of our house to a Hungarian public official. Father opened his office, and people came to him just as before. Mother took charge of the farm, managed by her brother while we were away. Because I was a Jew, I was precluded from going to the university in Hungary. I spent most of my time on the farm doing what work I could along with our farm help, who were reduced in number because about half of them had been drafted into the Hungarian Army. The work on the farm was very difficult. Some of our horses had been requisitioned by the army. The government dictated what we were to grow and how much of the produce we were to sell to the government. They even controlled how much wheat we could use for ourselves or offer to our help. I performed just about any work that had to be done and did part of the management with my mother's supervision.

Mother was a small woman, about five feet tall, very active, healthy, and smart. She spent as much time on the farm as she could afford while at the same time helping my father and running the house in the city with my sister's help. My sister was by then eighteen years old. In the year 1943, I was twenty-one years old and eligible for the draft. Jews were drafted into the Hungarian Army, not as fighting soldiers, but as military laborers. When we were drafted, we were lined up naked in front of two military doctors, who looked at us and made us open our mouths (I don't know why). We all passed that health examination. We were assigned to different regiments. I got my assignment to a labor regiment in Nagy-banya, a small town in the Carpathian mountains where some gold mining had been done and which in 1939 had been part of Romania.

Jewish recruits had to supply their own clothing and personal necessities. The army gave us only a military cap and a yellow armband that we had to wear on our left arm. We were required to have a military prescribed wooden box with a padlock. I had to report to Nagy-banya October 1, 1943. Mother saw to it that I had clothing that was as good as she could get for me along with two blankets, black shorts, socks, towels, and other various items. I went to the railroad station with a horse-drawn carriage. The first surprise was that all the recruits were placed in boxcars. In the boxcars, we sat on our military prescribed box, which was quite heavy. The trip to Nagy-banya took about six hours. We arrived in the evening. It was dark, and it was raining. I planned to engage a horse-drawn cab to get to the camp, but that did not happen. When we got off the train, soldiers ordered us to line up in fours, put our boxes on our shoulders, and march. I do not know how much my box weighed, but I will never forget how heavy it was. There was no choice, however, but to carry it, as did the other boys. We did not know where we were going until we got to a large building with some straw on the floor. The room was not big enough for all of us, so some of us were taken outside to an open shed that also had straw on the ground to sleep on. As I lay down close to the wall of the shed, something fell on my nose. It was dark, but my nose was bleeding so much that boys took me outside and kept washing me with cold water from the stream next to the shed. The bleeding stopped, but my nose and face swelled up and turned blue, and I realized that my nose was broken. It is crooked to this day.

To make sure that we complied with all the military regulations, the next day we got a

military haircut. My face looked like a swollen balloon, red and blue, that did not change my situation. We had to learn to march and respond to military commands. We were now stationed in the camp that was outside the town in the middle of a swamp. There was a big three-story concrete building of which only the first floor was finished. There they had offices, storerooms, and rooms for the guards. The upper two floors had only the concrete frame. The Jews were quartered on the upper two floors. We had steel bunk beds with wooden boards to sleep on and had our wooden boxes on the bed. There were no toilet facilities. We had to go out to the swamp and use the latrine. Sleeping on the wooden bed was very uncomfortable. What was more annoying, the officers on duty would come up and declare inspection, and we had to jump out of our beds, put on our military caps, and stand next to our beds. That could happen three or four times a night. We had only two blankets. The weather was cool; most of us sat on the military box, wrapped ourselves in the blankets, and tried to sleep sitting up. During the day we were sent out to perform all sorts of work: cleaning streets, working in the lumber mill, and draining the swamp. We were also trained to march – they even taught us to do the military goose step. Naturally that did not work very well because of our general condition. I do not remember how I notified my girlfriend, Irene, about where I was, but one day I was told to report to the office. When I got there, I was given a pass for a twenty-four-hour leave. When I got to the gate, Irene was there. She told me that she had been standing next to the gate and had tried to convince the guard to call me. General Reviczy had driven up with his carriage and asked her what she wanted. She told him that she wanted to see her boyfriend, and that was how I got the pass. General Reviczy was the commander of the camp. He was a wonderful man. He did everything he could to

make our lives somewhat better, but he could only do so much.

Irene, who later became my wife, rented a room in a Jewish house, because the hotel in town would not rent rooms to Jews. I took a bath, got some edible food. She took me to a doctor, who gave me some ointment for my nose and face, and we spent the twenty-four hours together. The situation in Nagy-banya you was terrible despite the fact that General Reviczy tried to help us as much as he could. When the division was organized, it was taken to the Russian front, and after a very short time the men were killed or escaped to the Russians. I was kept at the headquarters because I became a stable boy. There were two teams of horses for camp use. They were a type of horse I had never had anything to do with before or ever seen. One team was a white gelding and a white mare. The white mare was not only a terrible kicker, but when she kicked, she urinated. The other team was of two mares who kept biting like wild dogs. I was able somehow to handle those horses, and the old sergeant in charge of the barn was glad to have me. It was my good fortune, too, to be a stable boy because next to the stable was a small room with a stove, and I could keep warm and bring in provisions so I had something to eat. I could not eat the food we were given by the military, with the exception of the two pounds of bread we were given for two days and the coffee (chickory) every morning. We could also buy some food in the canteen when not seen by the officers. The position in the barn was much better, but I knew that it could change at any time and that I could be sent out to the front.

When I found that they were going to select mechanics to take to a military factory in

Budapest, where the workers' situation was much better, I registered as a tool and dye maker. There was not much to lose. I was selected with about twelve others. Some were real mechanics. A few were the same as I and had done some shop work. One of the boys was Robicheck, something of an entrepreneur, who before he was drafted had been involved in some shoe business, made a lot of money, and bribed officers and guards. When we were given our traveling passes and assigned two guards to take us to Budapest, Robicheck bribed the guards to change the traveling pass, and we all, including the guards, went to Robicheck's hometown, where we were hosted by his family and spent two days before we resumed our trip to Budapest.

The military factory in Budapest was on the banks of the Danube River. The group to which we were assigned had four hundred Jewish workers; for every ten to twelve boys, there was a civilian foreman, a few gentile soldiers, a sergeant, a lieutenant general, and a German captain in a Hungarian uniform. We were to manufacture different things for the military boxcars, navy anchors, shovels, etc. Some of the Jewish mechanics were far more knowledgeable than the foreman, and then there were the ones like me. The real mechanics helped us, and somehow we managed. Usually with that kind of work you did not have to be very knowledgeable, and we learned as we went along. The good thing about this camp was that at 5 P.M., the day shift could go out to town, not having to return until 10 P.M. In Budapest, there were many women whose husbands were in the regular army or in work camp, so they were glad to see us. The other good thing was that the civilian foremen were stealing, and they were willing to sell to us many of the items they stole. Some of the boys were exceptional mechanics. They could do just about anything,

with plans or without. One was a radio mechanic. Jews could not have radios, but he made radios from quartz crystals and some wires, and we could listen to the news and even the speeches of Churchill from England. The military fed us mostly cooked cabbage but permitted us to receive packages from home, and since we were able to go out, we seldom ate the military food.

This lasted until the day the English air force started to bomb Budapest. Their first target was the Csepel factory on the island in the Danube. Our camp was in line with that factory. So when the liberators came, generally at 11 A.M. and about 4 P.M., they dropped some of the bombs on our camp. They dropped bombs that not only destroyed the buildings but exploded above the ground and caused air shocks that affected many of the boys. They lost their voice and could hardly breathe, and they were shaking. No medication was provided for them. No shelter was provided for us. We were outside, watching the bombs falling, some of which were buried in the sand and exploded later. The bombing was a regular occurrence day after day. The production in the factory stopped, and we were put to work taking out all the usable equipment, loading it on flatcars, and taking it to a new factory – in Budakalasz, where a knitting factory was changed into a military production factory.

During these procedures, many of the boys were killed one way or another. The Hungarians tried to shoot down the liberators. We saw the traces, but I never saw one shot down. This bombing went on until no building was left standing. The factory in Budakalasz had no living facilities. A large barrack had been constructed in a corn field.

There was no fence around it, but we had trenches, although I didn't know why the trenches were needed.

Our situation changed. Now we could not go into Budapest unless we got a pass. And to get a pass was practically impossible. The food situation was much improved, and we were able to steal potatoes, corn, and some vegetables from the fields. Some of the women came to see the boys, and the trenches served as places where they could hide from the guard to have some enjoyment. We could get packages from home. The military could not control us. We had nothing to lose, so many times by taking off our military cap and the yellow armband, we escaped, got into Budapest by the local train, and started to associate with the underground. Adolf Eichmann was in Budapest. They were picking up Jews and were placing them in ghettos, from which they were taken to concentration camps. My girlfriend, Irene, came to Budapest and joined the underground. Our factory and camp were bombed daily by the Russians with small bombs and with the Stalin candle, which was an incendiary bomb that fell very slowly and always looked like it was falling on you regardless of where you were. We were out in the field and sometimes we would run from place to place until we realized there was no point in running and simply risked letting things happen as they may. Many of the boys got burned. I was very lucky and was not injured.

Since I was in contact with my girlfriend, I escaped from the camp and joined the underground. I found many people in the underground I knew, and they knew me. Our job was to save as many Jews as possible from being taken to concentration camps or

being killed by Germans or by the Hungarian Nazis. To do that, we had to provide them with false IDs and with food, clothing, and whatever help they needed. I did that day after day until I was caught. Luckily they did not kill me but beat me mercilessly, which for some reason I did not even feel, while they were interrogating me.

After being imprisoned by them for three days, I was able to escape when I was put to work loading large shells onto German trucks. I was working with a young friend whom I had met while we were in prison. After we finished our assigned tasks, I intended to tell the German officer that he should let us go. He came to me and said in German that he needed a jack, because the truck outside on the street had a flat tire. I found a jack in the shed and went out to fix the tire. I told my friend that he should help me. The Hungarian soldier had no idea what was happening. When we were in the street, I told my friend that he should escape and let the people in the underground know where I was. Suddenly I also had an opportunity to escape. But then I realized I had left my hat, which I considered a lucky hat, behind in the yard. I stupidly turned around and went back to put on my hat. Later, I found another opportunity to escape. Afterward, I had a great deal of pain in my head because they had beaten me with some kind of rubber hose. My ears were skinned, my head had welts and was greatly injured, and my courage was gone. I could not go out on the street, so I hid in my friend's apartment until December 16, 1944, when the Russians surrounded Budapest and the Germans and Hungarians surrendered.

The fight for Budapest was waged almost from house to house. The city was bombed by the liberators and by small incendiary bombs from the Russians. The German Army and

the Russian Army created barricades made by cobblestones that had been taken up from the street. The Hungarian Army had thousands of horses in the streets and in some stores. The horses had no food; they were freezing and being killed by the bombs and shooting. The people had no food and would cut some meat from the dead horses. The apartment where we were hiding had no windows left. We mostly sat in the bathroom, because it was more sheltered from the bullets and bombs. When the Russian soldiers conquered our apartment building, I was again lucky because I spoke Russian fluently and because I had had some contact with Russian soldiers in 1941 and 1942. I knew how to talk to them and was able to save my girlfriend and my friend's girlfriend from being raped. The Russian soldiers took everybody's watches, including my friend's, which had been his father's watch and was very dear to him. When his watch was taken, he pointed out the soldier to me, and I was able to retrieve it.

The Russian Army again was like a mob and fought like a mob. They used their automatic guns like machine guns and killed Germans and Hungarians by the thousands. They also lost many of their own. When I walked out, there were bodies all over. The Russians dug big graves in the parks and buried their dead. They robbed the houses of whatever they felt like taking. When one of their prisoners of war escaped, they took any man they could catch, and he became a prisoner. They were responsible for delivering a certain number. I had also learned in Russia that the Russian soldier was trained to obey orders and not to think for himself. So if you talked to him as a commander, he would obey. I used that technique with them and was successful in most instances. You had to talk loudly.

In our group, we had four men and two women. We decided to go home. To get there, we had to walk about ten miles to the railroad. To do that, we dressed the two women in old long coats, covered their heads with scarves, with their eyes hardly showing. The men also dressed in clothes we hoped the soldiers would not have any desire to take. But even this way, I had a job on my hands to protect the group from the soldiers, who wanted them to do various kinds of work for them. I do not remember how long it took us to get to the rail station. There was no regular train schedule. When they cut up enough poles to heat the steam engine, the train rolled. When the wood was gone, it stopped, and all the passengers had to cut any wood they could find in order to continue. Naturally we traveled in boxcars, and one of us was always sitting on our meager belongings to protect it from being stolen by the Russian soldiers. We traveled this way until we reached the town of Debrecen, where the train stopped and we all disembarked. Suddenly we were surrounded by soldiers, and all of us were taken to an office at the station and interrogated about who we were, what we had done during the war, and where we were going. Again, I was the spokesman for the group because I spoke Russian. There was also an interpreter at the desk. I didn't know him, but he knew me from the underground. When the interrogation was over, I told him that I was afraid we might be caught again and asked him if he could give us some document to avoid further interrogation. He told me to get photographs and come back to him and he would give us some document. We did that, and he gave us a document typed in Hungarian and handwritten in Russian. The photographs were attached, because you had to have that for a Russian document to be valid. He used the Hungarian kingdom rail stamp. The document stated our names, the

fact that we had been part of the underground, and that we had fought against the Nazi regime. I still have this document. It became the most useful document I had in Russia. Nobody could read it, so wherever I went and had to prove myself, I showed that piece of paper and was told "fine". It got to the point that I did not even have to buy a train ticket. When the conductor came, I would show him that paper, and he would tell me it was okay. I could travel from city to city.

After traveling about two days, we finally arrived in our city. It was evening, and we went to our house. It was empty: no furniture and no heat. We decided to go to the farm, hoping to find something there. The farm was 2 1/2 miles from our house. We walked. When we arrived, we could see that nobody lived there. The whole house was empty, and the only thing we found was the piano outside covered with straw. We were wet and tired and hungry. We walked over to a neighbor whom I knew and knocked on the door. The woman of the house came to the door. When she recognized me, she took us in and gave us food and told us to sleep in her bed. She would sleep on the couch. It was barely a one-room house. We slept over, and the next day we went back to the city. There we found about a dozen Jewish boys who had returned from the work camps. There were no Jewish women. They all knew us and were happy to see me and Irene. They all lived together. They had gathered some of the belongings of the Jewish people and lived in a house with several rooms that had once been owned by a family taken to concentration camp. This was in January 1945.

We also found some of our belongings that had been taken by our neighbors. Some were

glad to see us and gave us back our furniture and other possessions taken from our house. Some were not so happy to see us but did not refuse to return what belonged to us.

In our yard we found a big stack of papers. We sorted the papers. I found my graduation certificate, Father's diploma, bank books, and other valuable documents. With my graduation diploma, I was able to enroll at the Charles University in Prague, and my father's diploma enabled him to become a certified physician in the United States. In the beginning, we all lived together and shared our resources. Irene was the lady of the house. She did the cooking, but we all pitched in. In Sevlus there was a Czech officer by the name of Maskoph representing the Czech government, and Albert Elovic was in the hospital with a shoulder wound and in a cast. The Russian government installed a man named Kormos as mayor and Handera as county supervisor. I don't remember exactly when the Russians declared that there would be elections and the people voted to become Russian. I never heard about the election, nor did anybody else. But now the Russian government sent in many Russian officers, including the NKVD, now called the KGB.

Several people disappeared from the city. Nobody knew what happened to them, and Elovic and Moskoph were told that they should also leave the city immediately, which they did. After that, the Russians were in command.

I had to work for the government as a manager of industrial development, which we didn't have, and in charge of food distribution. I was in charge of the bakery and the distribution of bread. I was not happy with this position, because every day there was

some problem. One day, the flour did not arrive. I sent telegrams, telephoned to get flour, but there was no response. For three or four days we could not bake bread. There was practically an uprising in town, but there was no flour. Suddenly I was called to the office of the NKVD, which had the final word in everything. They asked me why we didn't give bread to the people. I told him that I could not bake bread if I did not have flour. Their answer was that it was my responsibility to give bread, and if I did not do that, they would send me to Siberia. Naturally, I became very scared. When I walked out, I met some of my friends and told them what had happened. One said "Do you remember when we were in the work camp in Budakalaszi and they brought in the old people and there was a man by the name of Neiman? He is in charge of the mill, so maybe he can help you." I remembered Neiman very well. I called and told him my problem. He remembered me and told me not to worry. In two hours a truck with flour would be on the way. I got the flour, but I knew I had to get out of there. In May, when the war ended, my father, mother, and sister came home from the concentration camp. Their survival was a miracle. After they saw the situation, they agreed that Irene and I had to get away. I tried to convince Father that they should come also, but Father said he was too tired and that he could survive under any conditions, but that we should go. By that time, getting out of there had become very complicated. To prevent people from escaping, the military had placed barbed wire along the border and had orders to shoot anybody approaching it. They killed many people including a friend of mine. So we had to figure out some other way to get out. We still had our false papers from the underground, where it showed we were from a city in Hungary (I still have these papers). I went to the border patrol office and told them we had inadvertently been stuck there and we wanted to go home, showing

them the false papers. They gave us a pass.

We had to take the train in Chop. Before we could get on the train, we were searched by the police. Some of the rubles we had were taken from us. The train had to pass through Czech territory. The train stopped at the border, and Czech soldiers got on the train. We knew this was going to happen, so when the train stopped we were at the cabin platform. We threw out the little baggage we had and jumped out. The Russian soldiers tried to get us back on the train, but we spoke Czech, and we told the Czech soldiers that we wanted to go to Prague. After some argument between the Russian and Czech soldiers we won. We stayed at the station until the train going to Prague came; we got on board and traveled to Prague. I had two cousins there and stayed with them for a short time and became a student at the Charles University.

As I write this story, I wonder how it happened that my immediate family – my father, mother, sister, and I – all survived. There were many factors. But for most part, we were simply lucky. Many of our relatives, friends, and neighbors were not. But I also think that other factors had something to do with it. First, the fact that my father was a doctor who had served in the Austro-Hungarian Army and had interned on the Russian front, where he learned a lot, and later was in general practice. Our age also had something to do with it. Father and Mother were both under fifty, my sister was under nineteen, and I was twenty-one. The languages we spoke were also important: German, Russian, Hungarian, Polish, Hebrew, English, and Czech. And, too, the experience we had had on the farm and the schooling we had had were helpful to us. We were the only family of four among

the Jews of our town – about 1500 to 2000 – who survived. I have not described all of our experiences during the Hungarian occupation or during our stay in Russia with Dr. Lachowicz or during the later time when our town became Russian. Every day was a miracle of survival, and if I were to describe some of the details, nobody would believe it. Every hour of the day and night, we lived in fear, because we did not know what the next minute would bring. Before my girlfriend Irene and I left Sevlus, my parents insisted we get married. Under the Russians this was a very easy procedure. You needed two witnesses who knew you. We went to the city judge, and he married us. The marriage license cost three rubles. By law, we could have gone the next day to the judge and paid five rubles and gotten divorced.

Under the Russian system, if somebody accused a person of cooperating with the Nazis, he was picked up – usually at night – and disappeared. Nobody could find out what happened to him. As I wrote before, many of the Russian soldiers did not want to go back to Russia and escaped. So the Russian Army would come after young men, usually at night, and a person would become a "volunteer" in the Russian Army. This was because they had to have a certain number. So most of us slept, not in the house, but in the yard or in haystacks in the fields.

Now let us get to our stay in Prague. I enrolled at the university. At first we lived with our cousins, and after a while we were able to get a two-room apartment that had originally belonged to a Jewish family and afterward to German officers. The apartment was fully furnished and even had some canned food. For money, we sold some of the

gold my mother gave us. She had buried this in our garden before they were taken to the concentration camp. There was also money that was due to my father from the Czech government before 1939 for treating government-insured patients. This arrangement was satisfactory. We got our food tickets and also some coupons to buy clothes.

This arrangement lasted until the government decided to change the currency. One morning the old money was useless. A person could exchange only 500 crowns, regardless of how much money he had. This situation created a major problem. Now we had no money to buy anything on the black market. One day when I came home from school, my wife gave me lunch and she started to cry. When I asked her why she was crying, she admitted she was so hungry she could not stand it. By a miracle, we ran into Albert Elovic, who had become a hero of the Czech Army and had many privileges. We told him of our situation. He brought food, mostly canned food that had come from the United States. This was a tremendous help, and he even took us to a restaurant, where we had a good meal. UNESCO had been established, and America was shipping food and clothing to Prague (including millions of neckties), and we were able to get some because Ali Elovic was involved with UNESCO as a Czech officer. We got so much food we were able to share it with friends. Ali Elovic, with his thirty-six decorations, was a real hero in Prague and had almost an open door wherever he went. We became Czech citizens and were hoping that would be our home. Then the situation changed. There was an election that was rigged, and the Communist Party won. That changed our lives and the lives of many people. Very shortly after the election, a law was passed that said everybody under the age of twenty-five had to register for the draft for three years. We

did not want to live under the communists and definitely did not want to go into the army.

So it happened that many people – mostly Jews – wanted to leave Czechoslovakia. The Jewish community in the United States became aware of the situation and made arrangements to provide the means to get people out – including the Jewish children who had been found all over Europe and brought to Czechoslovakia, mostly to Prague. First they were to be taken to Paris, France. To get them out was not easy. The people had to have a so-called stateless paper, a passport of no domicile. I, again by coincidence, got involved and made arrangements to obtain these passports by bribing the officials with money supplied by the Jewish joint agency. This was complicated because some of the children did not even know their names. So we had to name them and teach them what they should say if interrogated. The other problem was to get transportation. In Prague there was a travel agency called Wagon-Le and Chedok. We made contact with the manager, Mr. Polak. They had old Chevy busses but no gasoline. The gasoline had to come from France. The other problem was that in Germany, all along the road to Strasbourg, France, everything had been destroyed. There was no food or lodging available. The system we worked out was to leave Prague, usually with two busses loaded with as many children and adults as we could possibly squeeze in, and we would take them to the Czech border at Marianske Lazne, sleep overnight, and feed them. The next day we would drive over Germany and reach Strasbourg, where accommodations and plenty of food were available. The drive through Germany was very difficult because the bus was overloaded with children and adults, with jerry cans filled with gasoline on top. Any mechanical problem with the bus had to be fixed somehow by the driver and his

assistant. Mr. Polak was a genius. Whenever we broke down, he managed to find someone to help us.

I don't remember how many trips I made to Paris. They all were major undertakings and took much fortitude. We had more problems with the adults than with the children. They were very much afraid and more demanding than the children. While this was going on, one day, to our surprise, Father, Mother, and my sister showed up at our place. Their situation in Russia had become so desperate that they decided to leave everything behind and escape. Their escape had required much luck and ingenuity, but they had made it. We were very pleased to see them, but their ordeal was not over, because by that time the Russians and the Czech communists were arresting people who had escaped from Russia. My parents were very scared to be in Prague. I made arrangements for them to be on our next trip to Paris. When in Paris, they were supported by the Jewish agency, and very shortly they got a job managing the home where the Jewish children stayed in France until they were adopted by Jewish families from all over the world. My parents remained in France until 1947, when they came to the United States.

Irene and I got our visitor visas in Prague and arrived in New York on August 13, 1946. Again we were very lucky. Being able to speak English helped me get the visa in a very short time. I applied and got the affidavit of support from my uncle, who lived in Los Angeles. He had been in the United States since the First World War, when my grandparents and my mother came to the United States. At that time they had lived in Detroit, Michigan. My grandfather and mother worked at the Ford company.

Grandfather, who was a farmer, did not like the factory work and in 1920 came back with my mother to Sevlus, then part of the Czech Republic. My mother spoke English, and I remember her telling me when I was a small child a lot about America. I believe most of the things she told me, but I was convinced she was fibbing when she said that in America they sold ice cream in the grocery store and that you could buy it in the form of a brick. We were lucky to be able to buy a cone. We traveled from Prague to Paris by train and from Paris by plane (DC4) to Shannon, Ireland, from there to Gander, Newfoundland, and from Gander to the La Guardia airport in New York. Making travel arrangements at that time was very difficult, but because I had a connection with Wagon-Le and Mr. Polak, he was able to get us two tickets. I was able to pay for it with dollars I had earned from the Jewish agency. The Czech government allowed us each to exchange Czech money for ten dollars– so we were arrived in the United States with twenty dollars and some useless Czech money. The trip was very pleasant until Gander. Naturally the plane was packed. We were all given waterproof bags in case they were needed, but we not did not need them until Gander. At Shannon, Ireland, we were taken to a beautiful dining room and fed excellent food, a big treat for us. This was our first air flight, and we were very much impressed. Irene said that if we had money, we would always travel by plane. When we left Gander, things changed. We ran into a storm. Every time the plane hit a cloud, it bounced like a bucking bronco. The people in the plane all got sick and were vomiting. My wife got so sick I was afraid she would die. First we could not land in New York. They flew us around – I don't know where – until finally we landed at La Guardia, but the storm was so severe that the plane could not taxi to the terminal. We disembarked on the runway. They brought umbrellas, which groups of six held together,

and took us inside. Some doctors came around and asked if we were sick or if we needed medical help. I was under the impression that if an immigrant was sick when he arrived in America, he would be quarantined, so I kept telling the doctor that Irene was not sick and no medical help was needed. Now the real problem occurred: we each had to pay eight dollars head tax. I became terribly scared, because to my knowledge we only had twenty dollars. We paid the sixteen dollars and were left with four dollars.

I called my aunt, my father sister, who lived in Jackson Heights. From Europe there had been no way to notify her about our arrival. There was no answer. I did not know how far Jackson Heights was from La Guardia, so I took a taxi, watching the meter the whole time, intending to ask the driver to let us out when the meter showed four dollars. While we were sitting in the taxi, my wife became sick and vomited through the open window. She made a mess of the taxi. The driver was very patient and took us to my aunt's home. He got us out of the taxi, but he didn't want any money. We found ourselves on the street in front of a duplex. I rang the bell, but there was no answer. We were sitting on the little luggage we had. A lady from next door came out and asked who we were and told us that my aunt and uncle were with their grandchildren at a camp, but she knew the telephone number and she would call them. She took us to her apartment, put Irene to bed, and served us some tea and biscuits. She kept us there until my aunt and uncle and two grandchildren came home. This was how we arrived in the United States on August 13, 1946.

I still have the Czech passport and many of the forged certificates that we used when

working in the underground and that helped us escape from Russia and survive under the communists in Czechoslovakia. In the United States we could get along with a driver's license and Social Security card. In Europe at that time, we had to have a passport or certificate for everything. We had to remember in which pocket each certificate was to be sure we showed the right false certificate for each occasion. We brought those legal and forged certificates with us and still have them, but we have never had to use them in the United States.

To finish my short story, the United States was exceptionally good to us. My first wife, Irene, passed away in 1971, and I later remarried. My wife Betty is a wonderful person. We live in Keene, California, which for us is paradise, and my son from my first marriage, Robert, lives nearby in Bakersfield.